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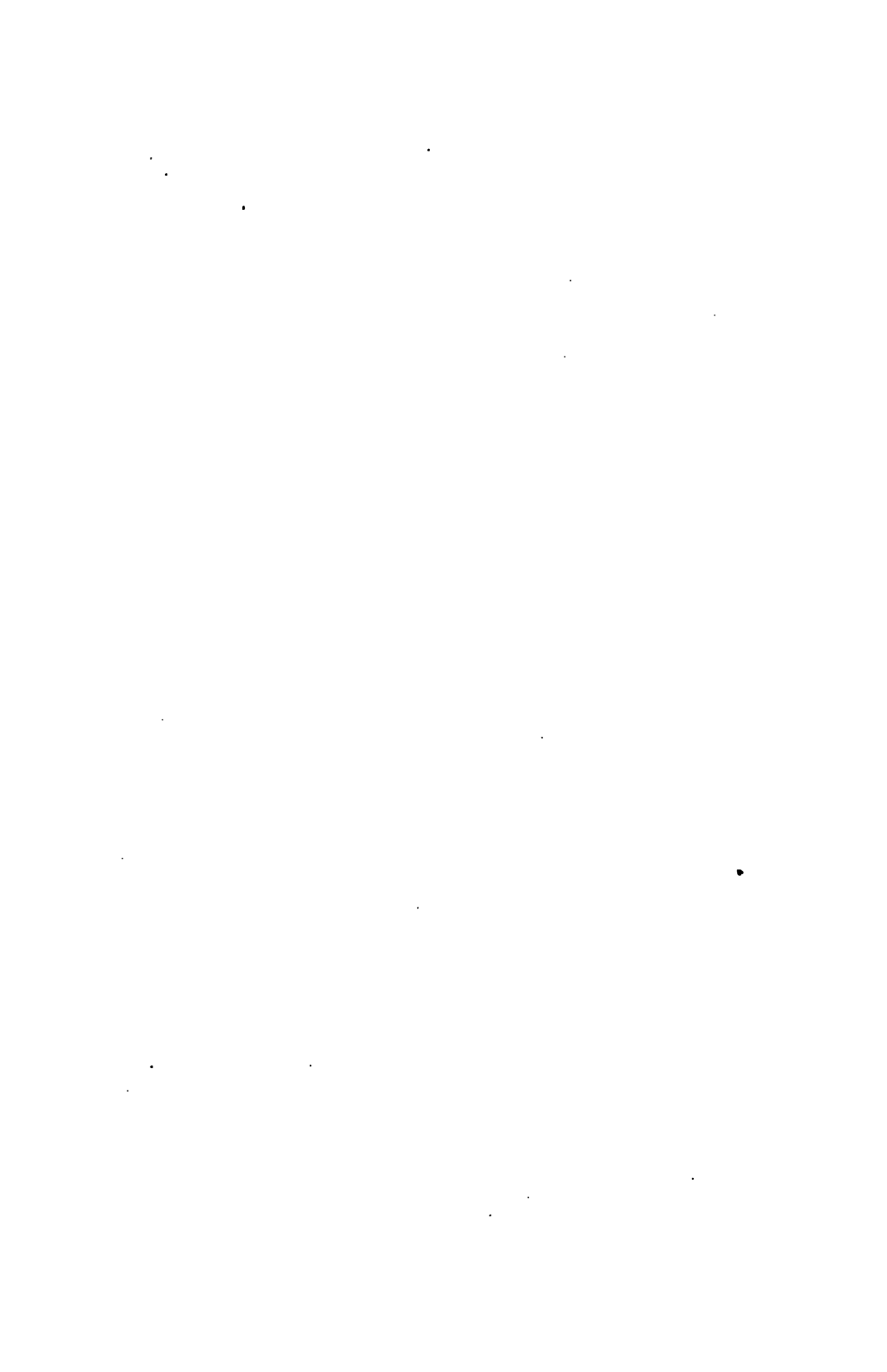
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BYRON

AND

"THE ABBEY."

A FEW REMARKS UPON THE POET, ELICITED BY THE REJECTION OF
HIS STATUE BY THE DEAN OF WESTMINSTER: WITH SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE ERECTION OF A NATIONAL EDIFICE TO CONTAIN THE
MONUMENTS OF OUR GREAT MEN.

BY

HENRY AUSTEN DRIVER,

AUTHOR OF

"HAROLD DE BURUN;"—"THE ARABS;" &c.

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April 2, 1838

In giving publicity to the following remarks, the Author has no other end in view than to do justice to BYRON, and promote, to the extent of his abilities, the NATIONAL object suggested. As a mouse may release a lion, so, a trifling *Brochure* like the present, however humble in the scale of literature, may help to set free the Fame of the Poet from the entanglements of prejudice: while the general hints thrown out—though for a somewhat gigantic object—may, under higher auspices, be as easily practicable, as the accomplishment of them would be greatly creditable to the spirit of the country.

Barnsbury Park, Islington,
December, 1838.

BYRON AND "THE ABBEY."

By the communion of the imperishable mind the dead still dwell among the living. But the PERSONAL CHARACTER of a distinguished Writer, however unjustly or unwisely confounded with his LITERARY REPUTATION in his own era, will generally become a question of secondary consideration in the estimation of posterity.

During his life he is, undoubtedly, amenable to society for his *public* conduct, so far as it may be influential upon others. But though the jealous eye of observation may glare upon his immediate actions; though his country may claim a moral right to sit in judgment upon him when he dies; and though the minute details of his personal biography may be occasionally referred to as matters of curiosity by succeeding generations; the works of his GENIUS will become the permanent and paramount objects of interest; while he himself will be ordinarily remembered as little more than A NAME encircled with the halo of *their* celebrity.

The personal history of every great man, nevertheless, may be considered as a portion of the annals of his country; and, as such, ought to be correctly *recorded*. When therefore such an one departs the world, it is the duty of those of his contemporaries who have survived him, to disengage their minds as much as possible from

existing prejudices ; to see that the judgment pronounced upon him, in their *own* time, be as nearly as may be a just one ; and that the tribute paid to his memory be such as will be most creditable to their own discernment, and most expressive of their own candour in the opinion of posterity.

We are led to these observations by the fate of one, who, though renowned through all the enlightened nations of the earth, is yet unjustly slighted and aspersed by many on his native soil.

Twice have the gates of "The Abbey" been closed against the illustrious BYRON.

His friends and admirers, on the arrival of his remains from Missolonghi, asked the Dean of Westminster—

if his illumined head

Might find repose among the honoured dead?

but they were answered—"No!" His body was therefore taken to make a TEMPLE of the rustic church of Hucknall. They asked again, if a marble tribute to his genius might be permitted to shine amidst the gothic shadows of "The Abbey?" but again they were answered—"No!" and the Statue of the great Poet still lies in the obscurity of the *Custom-house* of this— "Metropolis of the world!"

But few of us were aware of the neglect, or even of the existence of this noble work of art. But, on the announcement of the fact, simultaneously in both Houses of Parliament, the spirit of thousands was quickened—the fire of controversy rekindled—and the great original himself again summoned from the tomb to stand before the moral tribunal of his country. In the ensuing sessions

the Legislature will probably consider the degree of respect which *ought* to be paid to his memory: but, in the meantime, curiosity is on tip-toe, and conjecture busy as to the probable destination of this monument, said to be one of the Chefs-d'Œuvre of Thorwaldsen, the finest Sculptor of the day, executed in honour of the first of our modern Poets. And it is an enquiry of commanding interest: because the decision upon this particular case may probably determine the *general question* as to the fitness of "The Abbey" as a National receptacle for the ashes and monuments of our celebrated men.

Hitherto, however, it *has* been considered as dedicated to this noble purpose. It is therefore important, for the honour of our distinguished Bard, to ascertain, whether it be the opinion of an enlightened *people*, or whether it be merely the voice of a *limited party*, that has thus declared his bones unworthy to repose within the sanctuary of "The Abbey," and his effigy unfit to rank among the laureled of the nation.

Does any consistent reason exist for such repulsion?—This is the great question. If *none consistent*—then the act cannot be considered as national:—and if not national, it is time that the Nation should look to it.

Whatever reason may have been assigned for his exclusion, it must have had reference, either to his RELIGION, or his MORALITY; or to his TALENTS and INFLUENCE as a writer.

It will not require, we think, much argument to shew, that upon *neither* of these grounds can any *valid* objection be raised against his entrance into the monumental Society of his literary predecessors.

As a preliminary duty to ourselves, we at once, and once for all, declare, that we are not here as the apologists of error, or the advocates of vice: nor would we be such for all the honours of "The Abbey." We desire to go candidly into the subject. While, then, we deny the coarser accusations which malignant calumny has heaped upon Byron's head, we are ready to admit, though with feelings of deep regret, that his conduct *was*, on several occasions improper; and that his writings are, in many instances objectionable. To sophisticate these facts would be to vitiate all argument in his favour. But, the question before us is not, how far he resembled or surpassed others in purity or frailty—but, *how far, and in what way, the welfare of society is likely to be affected by his character or his writings?*

First, then, with regard to his RELIGION.

His wavering doubts upon points of faith and doctrine—his want of deference to established forms and opinions—and his indiscriminate attacks upon what he deemed their perversions and abuses—must, for his *own* sake, be lamented by every good, every rational man. But, as regards the degree of mischief which, in *this* respect, his works are likely to produce in the minds of *others*, no one of discernment, who has *really read* them, can have failed to perceive that the forebodings of his contemners are wilfully exaggerated; or, if sincere, are those of vague apprehension, rather than of sound judgment.

He who would make proselytes, even to Irreligion, must have some degree of *consistency*—some *fixed*

notion—some *standard*, as a rallying sign, whereby to lead or delude his sect. Byron had *no* such thing!—All that he ventured to do was to *doubt*: he never had the hardihood seriously to *deny*. His opinions upon Religion—if he had any thoughts deserving of the name—are so contradictory, that they necessarily neutralize each other. A mind thus sceptical even of its own scepticism—wanting faith even in its own want of faith—has no lasting power, we repeat, to lead, nor to mislead mankind: for men do not follow as a chief one who wavers in the van of Infidelity.

Byron, in this particular, differs widely from many of the infidel writers of England, France, and Germany, *They*, with a unity of purpose, and a deadly perseverance, have been fatally oracular to their followers: but *he*, by his paradoxical reveries, has wholly disqualified himself as an oracle. That man must be dull almost to idiocy, who would take the straw *he* offers, and *lean* upon it, mistaking it for a staff.

All that we trace in his works objectionable to religion, evinces but the idle bickerings of a mind ill at ease with itself. We perceive the waywardness of a genius, which, however great, however powerful upon other points, was, upon *this*, subject to strange and fitful impulses:—now sporting buoyantly on the sparkling stream of fancy—now sinking sullenly into the moodiness of doubt; but ever expressing the feelings of the moment, rather than the settled convictions of deliberate thought.

Hence the great folly of those who are constantly holding up to notice the worst portions of his works, in order to *shew* us that they ought not to be read. Far better would it be were the better verses of his nobler

muse more studiously discussed, and his less creditable ones less talked about. The moralization of the public mind is more effectually aided by the inculcation of what is good, than by the vituperation of what is evil.

The influence of a book depends *mainly* upon the *disposition* which the reader takes to its pages. If *that* be bad, he will make the evil he does not find; but if good, he will generally pass the ordeal of promiscuous reading in safety. None but the decidedly bad man would select notoriously anti-religious works. But no one who is accustomed to reading, and who would not shun many of the finest works of Genius, but must, without seeking it, occasionally encounter that which would be deleterious, *if preferred*; as, in his daily food he swallows many a poison that would be destructive, were he to feast upon *such* alone. The mental appetite, if healthy, digests, innocuously the partial detriment thus mingling with the wholesome aliment: but, if depraved, nothing will keep it from the garbage of the low libraries—compared with which the worst poetry of Byron is perfume. A mind that would be easily misled by his feeble demurs, would be readily seduced by irreligion in any form. The great bulk of his writings, however, is perfectly free from any theological objection; and though there are particular blemishes, there are also passages in them so favorable to a devotional feeling, that we can scarcely conceive that any one, not *previously* disposed to court mischief for its own sake, has ever risen from a *full* perusal of his works a worse man than when he sat down to them. In a few years this will be perfectly understood. No one will think of reading them for more than they are worth, politically, or theologically. *Those* dim characteristics

will be merged in the splendour of his poetical creations.

Numbers, we know, are loud in condemnation of his Lordship, who have never read him *at all*. Many too, who *have* read him, and who secretly delight in him, condemn him publicly, because it is *understood* that he ought to be condemned. But the most numerous and most unkindly class of all, are they who have "*just peeped into him*:" men to whose birdlime memories all the worst fragments of his poetry cling with the most admired tenacity: albeit they know nothing of those assuasive portions which *would* have struck them with Christian delight, had they been in *earnest* about him.

Numerous passages might be quoted from his works that breathe all the pathos, all the fervour of genuine piety. If it be argued that these *prove* nothing as to his sincerity in religion, the same plea may be advanced, that his flippancy in other parts proves *no more* as to the earnestness of his intention to disparage it. The whole tenour of his writings is such as to convince every candid mind of the truth of his biographer's declaration, that, "though a *Sceptic*, he was at *no time* a confirmed *unbeliever*." What his secret thoughts were, or what may or may not have been his silent communion with his Creator in his expiring hours, no one can tell—no one shall ever know. But we ought to cling to the Christian hope, that his spirit has not been banished from the presence of his Redeemer, as his body has been rejected by his fellow-sinners.

We have now to consider him with respect to
MORALITY.

The Public have little to do now with the *private* deportment, or domestic circumstances of Byron. We have never denied his occasional indiscretions, any more than we have doubted that he had naturally many amiable qualities; but we *do* deny that he is amenable to Society, or to the Rulers of "The Abbey," for *more* of his personal conduct than he himself has spontaneously obtruded upon them. He is not responsible for what has been dragged from his domicile, and coarsely exhibited in the streets. Men's private characters, so long as they outrage no public law, are things that stand between their Maker and themselves. No one has a right to peep through the key-hole of domestic privacy; or to enter its apartments and purloin its secrets, for the amusement of an idle crowd. Why then has Byron, more than any other man, been subjected to such vulgar inroads upon his seclusion? Partly perhaps through his own indiscretion in leaving the door ajar. But why, *now he is dead*, when he can no longer plead for himself, should we pertinaciously *fix* on him the exaggerated consequences of his own folly, by maintaining against him the lies that are now disproved; or by reviving the insinuations that can never be satisfactorily confirmed?

Had he been unknown as a poet, less flattered, less envied, his private character, in all probability, would have been unrecorded. But the fame that a man wins with his pen, must be paid for by the throbbings of the heart.

The public, if not more indulgent to the immediate errors of *other* celebrated men, seem less permanently delighted in revolving them. Many, of late years, whose conduct has been as reprehensible as that of our Poet,

have suffered but little from the *familiars* of the domestic Inquisition. A great stir has been made at the time—much rustling of Newspapers;—but—curiosity satisfied—a hasty veil has generally been thrown over their “indiscretions.” And it is prudent thus to conceal them. Upon moral principle we object to all public scrutiny into private affairs, beyond what is *legally* necessary; for the blazoning of particular vices cannot be other than a national evil;—the greater the more exalted the parties. To publish the domestic delinquencies of the great, is to snatch a stray brand from the hearth of the palace and fling it among the straw roofs of the peasantry. A wise man will *denounce* wickedness, but he will not be eager to *exhibit* it; for the finest moral is in its *rarity*.

In Byron's days the scandal-columns of the press were rife with stories against himself much fouler than any thing he ever satirized; and the intensity of the interest excited was always in the ratio of the intensity of the lie. Nor are we, in the present day, much more refined. Under the head of—“Common Pleas,” or some such common pretence, the curiosity of the vulgar is still daily fed with minute details of Crim. Con. actions, and fashionable faux pas, more mischievous by far to Society, by their *practical* expositions, than all the *ideal* particulars of Donna Julia's story. For these last, like the prose intrigues in Gil Blas, though but fiction, contain an *under-current* of stirring satire upon the habits and follies of mankind, which, however unpleasant to many who wish to enjoy the smooth *surface*, is not without its moral; though, in the present eagerness of censure, it is but rarely understood.

When we look to the *public* character of Byron—that by which he is commonly known in connection with his poems—we shall find that it is, in a great degree, a conventional one—as false as it is unamiable.

If, with a bold egotism, Rubens introduced his *own* portrait into his pictures—if he represented *himself* as St. George, or St. Bayon—if he clothed his Father, and his own three wives, in the vestments of Saints and Magdalens, to be bowed to at the altar of the house of God; not even the most besotted of the catholic crowd ever thought of identifying the painter and his family with the holy beings they worshipped. And yet, if, with half this egotism, Lord Byron gave but the slightest trace of himself in the fictitious personages of his pen, his *enlightened* countrymen instantly pronounced him to be the archetype of all that he drew of evil:—all the errors of all his heroes were affirmed to be unequivocally his *own*.

The ignorant and the prejudiced are too apt to judge of the compositions of a poet by what they hear of him as a man; or to judge of the man through the medium of his poetry. In Byron's case the conclusion from either of these premises would be exceedingly fallacious. Though in his works there are certain incidents, and certain tones of language, which make the man, the poet, and the hero *appear* to be almost identical; the resemblance exists chiefly in the reader's imagination; and is so glaringly to the prejudice of the writer, that the bare suspicion of its verity would be as cruel as it is false, but that he himself, in the early vanity of authorship, in some degree assisted in exciting it.

Eager for fame at whatever price, he sought publicity by *affecting mystery*. And, partly in bravado, partly from eccentricity—(we might almost say, idiosyncrasy) he habitually represented himself, or encouraged others to imagine him, in ordinary life, far worse than he really was. The sinister outline therefore which he seemed to have sketched of himself, in his poems, was instantly filled in with those colours which the public are ever accustomed to use when you leave it to *their* taste to *finish* your portrait. By the aid of conjecture, a picture was completed, which, being suitably framed by his commentators, and carefully varnished with the gloze of fanatic zeal, bore a tolerable resemblance to his sable majesty the king of Tartarus. It was however declared to be his Lordship's *miniature*: and was received as such by the lovers of the marvellous.

In all this there was gross folly as well as injustice. In his own poetical pictures, it is true, many of the figures exhibit the gloomy mannerism of the painter. Deeply imbued with umber—dark and wild—they mark him, in that peculiar mood, the Salvator Rosa of Poetry. The peculiarity, however, was chiefly in the subject. True to his art, he made his Corsair *like* a corsair; his Cain like a fratricide; and his Lucifer like a spirit of evil. But, with all the propriety of contrast, he made his Medora the model of a loving wife; and his Zuleika an angel of purity. His taste may be impugned as to the choice of his subjects; but having chosen them, he handled them with a master-hand. With a fearful truth, too, he depicted, what no limner can reach—the *chiaro scuro* of the human heart. He saw into its depths with an intuitive eye, and explored its dark recesses. But

does it therefore follow that his *own* breast was the depository of all that he depicted? Almost as well might we identify Spencer with his own personification of Despair—Shakspeare with his own hideous Caliban—or Southey with the accursed of his own “Kehama”—as assimilate his Lordship with his own Alp—his own Giaour—or his own Childe Harold. And yet, this last has become his cognomen: harmlessly with some; but malignantly with many

Childe Harold went forth from a venerable *monastic* pile—

“ a youth
 “ Who ne in virtue’s ways did take delight;
 “ But spent his days in riot most uncouth,
 “ And vex’d with mirth the drowsy ear of night.
 “ Ah, me! in sooth he was a shameless wight,
 “ Sore given to revel and ungodly glee;
 “ Few earthly things found favour in his sight
 “ Save concubines and carnal companie
 “ And flaunting wassailers of high and low degree.”

Byron himself went forth from the venerable *Abbey* of Newstead, upon *his* travels. This was quite sufficient. Notwithstanding all the “earthly”—all the heavenly things too, that did find “favour in *his* sight,” as a Poet—HE, of course, was the Childe, with all his attendant crimes.

He was *not* the Childe! The ideal character accorded, in some respects, with the tone of mind in which he was disposed to write. But he and the pilgrim are no more one, than are the individual and the costume at a masquerade. Byron himself was the real Traveller: the vice-worn Pilgrim was only the habit he *assumed*. As a poet, he spoke *of* the pilgrim in the language of *fiction*: but, as a peripatetic philosopher, commenting upon what he saw, he spoke *through* the pilgrim in the language of *sincerity*. The poem is, in fact, but a sublime

Itinerary, in which the narrator avoids the vulgar and disgusting egotism of ordinary Books of Travel, by speaking in the *third* person; poetically rendered a *personage* of striking interest.

Not only have we Mr. Moore's declaration that at Newstead, Byron's usual companions were "of habits "and tastes too intellectual for mere vulgar debauchery," but Byron himself, perceiving that the false notion, which his poem in part encouraged, was likely to obtain too extensive credence, gave his readers this prefatory warning. "A *fictitious* character is introduced for the "sake of giving some connection to the piece. In this "fictitious character, 'Childe Harold,' I may incur the "suspicion of having intended some *real* personage: this "I beg leave, *once for all*, to disclaim. Harold is the "child of imagination, for the purpose, I have stated. In "some very *trivial* particulars, and these merely *local*, "there might be grounds for such a notion, but in the "main points *I should hope* none whatever." Yet, notwithstanding this earnest assurance, the public, preferring the *mystery*, fastened upon himself all the wildest creations of his own genius. In vain he explained; in vain he deprecated in the words of his own Heraldic Motto—" *Crede Byron!*" they would *not* believe him. The impression had been produced, and it could not be effaced from the minds of the prejudiced. Had he known the public better at the time, he would not probably have trusted it with so much power to malign him. By his want of prudence, he thus trifled away his fair character while living; and his reputation is, in consequence, still undergoing the expiatory purgatory of existing prejudices.

We now turn to that which more intimately concerns society:—*the morality of his writings.*

Much that has been said on the subject of Religion would be equally applicable here. But the moral influence of his works will depend chiefly upon a correct *public* appreciation of his peculiar genius. When that shall be well established, in place of the false one which has long prevailed, he will be read with those allowances which are usually made for the exuberance of talent which has erred without direct depravity of purpose; and quoted with that caution which is the result of deference to public opinion. His chief error is, a too daring display of his *powers*. Too open—too apt to shew things as they *are*—he frequently offends our sedate judgment. In his over eagerness, also, to tear away the mask from the face of Hypocrisy, he has sometimes trodden upon the veil of Modesty; and, however he may have softened the error by the elegant apologies of his fancy, we cannot but regret its commission. But if there is occasional levity in his verse, there is little that can be considered as ribald; less that is coarse. And, though it may please the specious to say, that *he has dressed Vice in the garb of Virtue*; it would be far more correct to assert, that *he has stripped human nature of its conventional trappings, and shewn it too nakedly*.

It would, we know, be but poor argument to say, that there is nothing in him so offensive to decorum, but *worse* may be found in Chaucer, Dryden, Pope, Swift, or even our divine Shakspeare: yet, if the dross of these has been passed over by wise consent, and they are honoured for the purer gold with which they have enriched our literature, the comparison is *not* odious: the odium is, in not giving to *him* comparative honour for the unexceptionable products of *his* genius.

We say not this to extenuate the wrong: for bad *is* bad, however it may cover itself with the cloak of example. But we urge it purely as a reason for not withholding from him that which is accorded to others who, *like* him, have exhibited the weakness, as well as the greatness, of man's nature. It would, unquestionably, have been far better had Byron been entirely free from faults. From the garden of his genius might be gathered a volume of weeds that could *well* be spared. But, this removed, the remainder would not raise a blush upon an angel's cheek; although a tear might trickle down it to think that *such* a mind was not as pure as its own. Would that that one volume of imperfections could be amassed and destroyed! Its loss, like that of the Sibyl's books, would greatly enhance the value of the rest. Yet who would destroy the rest because of that one? He who would do this, must be either a dullard, a barbarian, or a casuist with tenets so finely spun as to make him afraid of their weakness.

In concluding our remarks upon Byron's character, as a MAN, we must repeat, (what we think all reflecting minds believe,) that he was not *inherently* irreligious or immoral. The degrees of culpability depend greatly upon incentives and circumstances. In Byron's case there are many things that would plead strongly for him *in foro conscientia*, whatever might be their weight in the more rigorous court of abstract right and wrong.

Few men, indeed, have been placed in positions more perilous to their moral stability than he. Many incidents were against him; no one of which *alone* might have determined his career; but which, gradually operating upon his peculiar temperament, developed his

character, as the world beholds it—marked with many faults. The early period at which he became “Lord of himself”—the erring tutelage of his widowed mother—the disappointment of his early affection—the wound inflicted upon him as a young author, when the *stylus* of criticism was turned into a *stiletto* of cruelty, to stab his aspiring hopes—his friendless entrance into the House of Lords—his domestic alienations, whether a cause or a consequence of the *res angusta domi*, or whatever else—(a point that can never be fairly determined *in his absence*)—but, more than all, the virulence of public calumny, that induced him at last, like Aristides, to sign the shell of his own ostracism:—*these*, working successively upon a sensitive, quickly resentful, but by no means implacable nature, if not an effectual *apology* for the strange humours, and almost misanthropic bitterness, to which he sometimes abandoned his strong mind, may partly *account for them*, and save him at least from the imputation of spontaneous depravity.

There is another thing, too, that should not be lost sight of. Notwithstanding the frequent sportiveness of his fancy, his mind had a strong *constitutional* bias—a natural polarity to *melancholy*. Though, under the slightest excitement, it would vibrate at one point, or rapidly swing round to *all* points of the mental compass; yet, left to itself, it ever turned again to its icy and gloomy pole. This state of mind may be both admired and regretted: admired, as the source of much of that sublime poetry which has enchanted millions; regretted, as the cause of much of that anguish which blighted the brief summer of his existence.

That his heart was early and freshly open to the best sentiments of our nature; that he was ardent and affectionate as a friend, and honourable and generous in his dealings as a man,—countless instances might be adduced from his biography, and substantiated by those who, still surviving him, retain the kindest recollections of their intimacy. The opinion pronounced upon him, after his decease, by SIR WALTER SCOTT—himself a highly honourable man, the father of a family of daughters, and one who knew him well, and well knew how to distinguish between the settled purposes of vice and the passing frailties of genius—is in itself a monument in his favour. That noble eulogy, which may be considered as a funeral oration over his departed friend, is so replete with just and generous sentiments, that it does equal honour to the head and heart of the encomiast, as to those of the object of his praise.

Having thus shewn, we trust, that neither on the score of Religion, nor on that of Morality, any sound reason exists for his exclusion from “The Abbey,” we have now briefly to enquire, whether HIS RANK AMONG THE LITERATI OF THE AGE does not *command* his admission.

In the controversy recently revived, many strange, and, to the unthinking, prejudicial opinions have been broached as to the degree of his poetical merit. For the honour of our country, we would not have the foreign reader, or even the careless of our own community, misguided by anonymous and irresponsible writers.

Many of the discussions and comments with which our periodicals have teemed, deserve, from their

moral tone, all the respect that is due to sincerity, however we may question their critical consistency. But there are others deserving of contempt; because we detect in them the covert malice of individuals who, having themselves had the cup of poetic inspiration constantly *in view*, have been doomed, like Tantalus, never to taste it. These men, whose minds retain the leaven of the "old wrong,"—who never can forgive the crime of superior merit—these—with all that courage which the *absence* of an antagonist inspires, have declared that he was *not* a great Poet. To degrade *him*, they are willing to degrade *the age*:—for if *he* did not fulfil the definition of Horace:—

"Ingenium cui sit, cui mens divini, atque os

"Magna sonaturum, des nominis hujus honorem."

—what a set of meteors have we been mistaking for stars! If *HE* is not a great poet, *who* among the writers of our era has a claim to that august title? That he was the leading bard of the age, not even his own fraternity will dispute, however it may be denied by the underlings.

The Athenian generals, after putting forward their own claims to superiority, all concurred in naming Themistocles *second* to themselves. In like manner, the poets of the present age, even were they so vain as to doubt the pre-eminence of Byron, would all assuredly name him *their* second; and thus, by the majority of their suffrages, would crown him the *first* among them.

As the beauty of his compositions can no longer be denied, the more envious of his commentators console themselves by disputing their originality, and pronouncing him an egregious plagiarist. They know the assertion to be false:—they know, that if he ever *wittingly* adopted

the ideas of others, he took them but as the cloth whereon to embroider his own rich and flowery fancy:—that, if he ever caught his inspiration from them, it was but a spark to fire, as it were, the rocket of his own Imagination, which, mounting into a superior region, would there burst forth into a shower of *new* and radiant images. But they do *not* know, because they do not feel it, the independence of true genius with regard to coincidence:—they do *not* know that, like a bold engineer, the master-mind would rather tunnel a mountain that stood in its way, and dash through it, than give the train of its thoughts a circuitous turn to avoid it:—they do *not* know the genius of BYRON!

Let them, however, take the benefit of all their quibbles. So much of indisputable originality still remains, that, if HE be not admitted among the most eminent of our Poets, the door of admission to “The Abbey” may be safely shut:—for there will assuredly be no more genuine poetry for centuries to come.

But his right to shine among the most brilliant there is incontestable. With all deference, therefore, to those who still pronounce him *execrable*, we think them greatly in error. We would not, more than they, approve of what is wrong. But we must remind them, again and again, of what appears to be sufficiently obvious, that the tribute which the nation *would* pay to the *genius* of the POET, would not be to the *faults* of the MAN. It would by no means be intended as a recognition of his errors.

The honour would be paid to one, who, by the splendour of his genius, has added glory to our language: who, by calling forth its powers, has practically shewn

us, that, with the vigour and simplicity of its Saxon origin, the resonance of the Greek, the grandiloquence of the Latin, the dulcet grace of the Italian, and the garrulous ease of the French, it possesses an expansibility and flexibility of which we had previously but little conception.

The honour would be paid to one, who has sent his literary fame, and consequently ours, through all the languages of Europe.

It would be paid to one, who has held up the mirror of Truth to the eyes of the WORLD, and shewn her what she really *is*, when stripped of her false trinkets and meretricious cosmetics.

It would be paid to one, who had the courage to assail Vice even in her highest places; to beard the voluptuous selfishness of bloated power; and to pronounce prognostics, which time has verified, notwithstanding the clamour of all the sycophants of the day.

It would be paid to one, who has lashed the crimes of human nature in the gross:—who, in his detestation of War, has used his talents to save the effusion of blood:—who, with a frightful irony, in his siege of Ismail and other scenes, has so glutted the imagination with ruthless butcheries, that, by deepening our loathing, he has helped to abate our passion for conquests of mere ambition.

It would be paid to one, who, in the sacred cause of liberty put forth his manliest energies; and mentally and practically assisted in the manumission of millions of Christian Greeks from the thrall of the Mahomedan.

It would be paid to one, who has cast his very soul into the noblest works of Art, and the grandest of Nature:—who has breathed a living spirit into the

marble silence of the Apollo—the Laocoon—the dying Gladiator; and given a voice to the stupendous Alps; and made them more beautiful, more expressive, more sublime than before.

It would be paid to one, who, versatile as volatile, powerful as beautiful, by a thousand Protean fancies, and a thousand treasurable aphorisms, and deep-toned moral reflections, has furnished to myriads the means of intellectual enjoyment. Who has, in short, embellished our literature with poetry, pathos, and passion:—passion, that frequently exalts our nature—pathos, that softens and refines the heart—poetry, that at once inspires and astounds the imagination.

If all these be not sufficient for “The Abbey,” cast them aside, and take but his “Hebrew Melodies.” Inscribe *them* around his pedestal. They *alone* might give sanction to the presence of his statue in *any corner* of that building; for they are at least equal in holiness to his noble description of St. Peter’s at Rome:—and *that* might warrant its erection beneath the very dome of that most magnificent of temples.

Whatever good was intended by the marked disrespect which has been shewn to his memory, the act was not only unproductive of benefit, but was exceedingly *impolitic*. Almost all things flourish under persecution. It was this which first bent the strong bow of his genius, and prepared it for the shafts of his satire. But a sacerdotal denunciation of him now, in the nature of a catholic anathema, or a classic execration, will have far more injurious consequences. It will arouse the worst sympathies of the worst men; who, going far *beyond* the poet in infidelity and moral obliquity, will

espouse *his* cause in order to forward their *own*; and, by deliberately disseminating the worst portions of his works, will promote the evil which his opponents deprecate. The slightest knowledge of human nature will approve the truth of this.

Already, by vituperating him, and condemning even those better editions of his works, which are accompanied by the mitigatory notes and opinions of amiable and learned men, they have provoked the *curiosity* of the rabble, and driven them to the bookstalls for sixpenny editions of garbled text, illustrated, or rather darkened, by pictures in a style never contemplated by the author; and from which Milton himself would not have been exempt, had the scenes of the loves of our first parents been trumpeted about as obscene.

Had the ashes of BYRON been honourably interred, and his statue quietly erected in "The Abbey;"—had no *fuss* been made about him, but the multitude been left to themselves; all would have passed off creditably to the country. The people would have been satisfied; having no other feeling in the question than their constitutional detestation of persecution where they suspect it. Of BYRON's finer poetry *they* know but little: for he is *not*, nor probably ever will be, what is termed a *popular* Poet; however he may have been made to appear so for awhile by clamour. Though he wrote without effort, he is not read without effort. His style is too condensed, too erudite, too classic, for the unpolished lovers of sing-song. He is for the aristocracy of readers—the thinking few; not for the thoughtless many. Leave him alone, to his shadows as to "his glory," and the Million will care little about his poetry; however they may admire his statue as a *work of art*.

Having thus, merely as a *formal duty*, asserted the *title* of the Poet to receive the honours of our present national mausoleum; we desire to go no farther. We should, indeed, almost regret to see the point conceded *now*: for, could the *spirit* of BYRON be consulted, *he* assuredly would spurn the reluctant boon. Take his own living words for it—penned in his utter scorn of a similar slight, intended to dishonour another.

“ When the vain triumph of the imperial lord,
 “ Whom servile Rome obey'd, and yet abhor'd,
 “ Gave to the vulgar gaze each GLORIOUS BUST,
 “ That left a likeness of the brave, or just;
 “ What most admired each scrutinizing eye
 “ Of all that deck'd that passing pageantry?
 “ What spread from face to face the wondering air?
 “ The thought of Brutus—*for his was not there!*
 “ That absence proved his worth,—that absence fix'd
 “ His memory on the longing mind, unmix'd;
 “ And more decreed his glory to endure,
 “ Than all a gold Colossus could secure.”

That reader must himself be marble, who does not thrill when he thinks that the Statue of the writer of these lines has been similarly excluded. We will not say that it has been similarly honoured; but it has certainly not been *dishonoured* thereby in the eyes of the enlightened.

We will now change our position. Having discussed the fitness of the Poet to enter the walls of “The Abbey,” let us look to *their* fitness to receive *him*, so far as regards the characters of those who *already* repose within them. Poets, statesmen, monarchs—are the silent inhabitants of the pile. But, if none but the righteous, or the pure, should be there, how comes it that,

among them, it enshrines those who have empurpled the pages of our annals with martyrs' blood; or over whose tombs the black wings of murder cast an historic gloom?—Why sleep among them those whose pens have polluted the pages of our literature with grossness and impiety—men of all failings—deists, materialists, irreligionists, immoralists! The answer may be, that they rest in the bosom of the Church, because of their greatness by birth or talent; but that, if vicious, they came there in ages less refined than this: and that if the friends of BYRON have twice rapped at the gates in vain, it is because of the improved condition of our morals.

Whether such be the answer, or not—new questions *now* must inevitably arise. The Nation will ask with a *Secular* voice: “*Is it wise, at all, to pay worldly honours to worldly eminence in edifices consecrated to religious purposes?*”—It will enquire also, with the voice of *Decorum*,—“*Is it proper to make a show of the Monuments for the emolument of the church or its ministers?*” We give the *present* Dean full credit for his motives, as well as his zeal. If mistaken, the Country is more in fault for investing him with such discretionary power, than he in exercising it. But if, henceforward, the wish of millions is to be stifled by the veto of an individual:—if no more of our sons, however bright their genius, are to be admitted, unless they be pleasing to the future authorities of “The Abbey,” who may go on with objections—we sincerely hope not—“to the end of the *Chapter*”—the answers to the foregoing questions are palpable.—“The church is *not* a fitting Repository for the monuments of men eminent in the Arts, Sciences, or Literature: inasmuch as we have no



“ security, for the *future*, that sectarian or political “ obstacles may not stand in the way of justice. But, in “ so far as ‘ The Abbey’ *has* been devoted to such purpose, the *Exhibition* of the accumulated monuments, “ *for lucre*, is unjust, as well as paltry and pitiful. “ For, if they belong to the Nation,—the Nation has “ assuredly a right—‘ to look when it likes at *its own*.’ ”

What then is to be done?—Can we pause a moment? LET SOME MORE APPROPRIATE EDIFICE BE ERECTED!—a Structure so dignified in aspect as to do honour to already departed genius; and so noble, as to arouse the loftiest aspirations of the living:—a TEMPLE at once solemn and exciting: wreathed with the undying laurels of the great: presenting pedestals and niches soliciting *new* occupants: and with gates *expanding* to receive them.

Let but the wish be expressed, and there are high-minded men enough in the kingdom ready to furnish the means: aye, thousands, who would much rather dip their fingers into the gold end of their purse to subscribe for such an edifice, than touch the silver one—to “ pay for peeping ” into *Poets’ Corner*. Let but the thing be propounded, and the government will not be deaf to it; for its Members, most of them, are educated men, who know how to appreciate the works both of BYRON and THORWALDSEN. Our literary and scientific men would lend it their advocacy and aid; for the cause would be their own. Our merchants, too, would hold out a liberal hand: for many of them, though assiduous in business, breathe their leisure in the elegant and learned retirement of classic homes. Nor would the people look on

indifferently; for from among them have sprung many of "Nature's nobility."

That such an Edifice is desirable, were it merely to vindicate our national taste, we have only to refer to that wretchedly incongruous assemblage of elegances and oddities which has given to the monumental department of "The Abbey" the vulgar name it bears. As a whole it is derogatory from the present refinement of the country.

In milder climates, the open Cemetery may be preferable as a national place of interment: for one is impressed with the idea, and not wholly erroneously, that men of various grades of excellence and eminence may rest together with more propriety under the dome of heaven, than under the cupola of a public building. Of such a Necropolis there is an admirable specimen in France. In the grounds of *Père la Chaise* are congregated the ashes of men of all ranks and merits:—the amiable—the unamiable—the great ones of history.

There sleep together the Royalist, the Revolutionary, the Imperialist. *There* is the green grave of Ney—a soldier, shot as a traitor to his king, but remembered as "le brave des braves"—the hero of a hundred battles fought for his Country. There soars conspicuously the Cenotaph of Cassimer Perrier: there lies in ponderous granite, the savage tomb of Davoust: there stands in eloquent marble, the graceful statue of Foy: and there may be seen—the medallion of Manuel, the obelisque of Massena, the sarcophagus of Lefebvre, the bust of Suchet, and the various memorials of Caulincourt, Lavallette, Talma, Laplace, Fontaine, Molière, with countless others, foreigners as well as natives of distinction, mingling their honours promiscuously: while their dust is dispersing

in the grave. No one asks whether they *ought* to be assembled in the *same* consecrated ground. Most of them are to be found in the political, or in the literary histories of their country. Into these we are to look for their *characters*: but, be they good, or be they evil, we recoil not at their graves.

In this climate, however, a building in the nature of a PANTHEON, such as may be found in some of the Continental cities, would better suit our purpose. But it must not be called a *Pantheon*: for it might displease the honest prejudices of many who are more scrupulous about a name than the unsophisticated Juliet. Whatever its appellation—let it be worthy to receive those whom the Nation may desire to hold in its remembrance.

Were such a project carried into effect, what an honour would it be to the Edifice that its foundation stone had been virtually laid by the *mortmain* of the noble Poet! What an honour to BYRON, that *his* statue, though not the last rejected from "The Abbey," was the *first* to grace the Temple! How gratifying would it be to every independent mind to behold this fine achievement! How delightful, while the rising generation *freely* traversed its area, to be able to say:—"That image, child, is the statue of the great Lord BYRON:—a man of some errors, but of much literary excellence. The tribute which you behold, so admirable as a work of art, was paid to him—*not* for his *errors*, but for his *excellences*!"—The child, in after life, would no doubt *remember* the distinction.

But, whatever decision may await his monument, it will not now be pronounced amidst such heat of party

as would have existed some years ago: nor will it so much depend upon the bitterness or the forbearance of those whom his pen had then too recently irritated, and who held in their hands the lever of the public press. Personal resentment is gradually dying away, since the hand of offence is cold.

The more dignified of those who, under political or other excitement, were satirically assailed by him, in the days of his genius and folly, have now a fine opportunity of shewing by their magnanimity, that the satire was undeserved: for the pen can no more indelibly *tattoo* a truly great man's character, than it can *taboo* the writer from the temporary obloquy of having aspersed him.

What, for instance, has such a man as the Duke of Wellington to fear from Byron's lampoons? They are both too secure of their fame to be lastingly injured by each other. He, who recently took salt with the Marshal who had long and often encountered him in the field of war, is too noble, too soldierly, not to do honour to the monument of a distinguished countryman, who only sportively assaulted him in the field of politics.

What have such men as Southey and Wordsworth to fear? Byron and *they* are too secure of their fame to be prejudiced by each other. They, also, are too high-minded, too generous, not to assist in raising a memorial to that genius, whose lustre, mingling with their own, has helped to characterize our era as one of peculiar splendour.

To the generosity, taste, and judgment of these, and of all the *influential* of the day, we leave this interesting

question. By the energy of a few the many may be easily moved. A PUBLIC MEETING should be called, on the eve of parliament, to take the subject into consideration; and respectful, but firm petitions addressed to the Government, praying that the Nation may have the liberty to take "THE MONUMENTS" of its most distinguished children under its own protection.

Great as we are as a mechanical and commercial country, and high in the favour of Mammon, we are in many of the finer arts still plodding at the heels of smaller and less opulent Nations. Our sculpture, with some few bright exceptions, is unfortunately too poor not to need the rich addition of *any* work by Thorwaldsen. To neglect the one which is now in our *custody*, honouring as it does one of our own countrymen, so great in another walk of genius, would be to disgrace us in the eyes of the Continent.

The celebrated Artist, who has thus paid the homage of his own prolific mind to a congenial spirit, being associated with the leading virtuosi and literati of Europe, will naturally advert to the fact that, *we* have, with the dullest apathy, allowed his favorite work, and the great original for whose honour it was designed, to be alike ignobly *buried*:—the one by the Landing-waiter of our Customs—the other by the sexton of an *otherwise* obscure Country Church. Such extraordinary fatuity must tend to confirm our neighbours in the opinion, that the merits of genius, here, are too frequently pared down to the measure of our bigotry: that we are (—what we *certainly* are—many of us—) a *canting* people:—now studiously evincing our *sense* of shame by shunning statues too thinly draped; now as ready to condemn

one, though wrought by Praxitiles himself in purest Parian, if the original of the figure had but a single "blue-vein" in his *character*. It must convince them, that, though surrounded by charities, we are still *uncharitable*: that, though we pour from the golden vessels of pride, through the ostentatious Subscription-columns of a newspaper, what *seems* to be the very milk of human kindness, we are as ready to pour, through the adjoining columns, the black stream of defamation against those who, like Byron, dare to doubt our simulated virtues.

A large portion of our middling classes, as well as the lower order, have their minds still "heavily-ironed" by Bigotry: but Education is busily employed in striking off their fetters. The sooner this is done, the sooner we shall redeem the country from the imputations that are upon it. The intelligent and the independent have, fortunately for our credit, *already* taken up a position in advance of "The Abbey;" and, looking, as it were with the eyes of Posterity, upon the exalted Poet and the eminent Sculptor upon whose works we have been commenting, anticipate for them, with confidence, the favorable fiat of Time, the great arbiter of Truth.

Here we shall close our arguments.—However weak, we are little disposed to prop them by any appeal to the feelings; or, to ask a grace for supposititious virtues. We cannot, however, forget the *age* at which Byron *died*. Many authors have existed, whose course, even beyond the age of forty, has been through the paths of error; but who have closed their career, at a much



later period of life, with the palm of virtue in their hands. Byron *died at thirty-six!* a time at which some writers have scarcely begun their fame, and at which the generality of mankind have hardly begun with earnestness *to think!* Had it pleased God to prolong his existence, what might we not have hoped from such a mind? He had powers to educate an age:—a soul capable of all that is highest and holiest—a heart susceptible of all that is warmest and kindest. Had he survived the accomplishment of the noble object for which he laid down his pen, it is not too much to believe that he *would* have sent forth some grand and redeeming work:—for the elements of such were conspicuously within him. Blest with the opportunity of applying the torch of his own correcter judgment to the funeral pyre of his early literary errors, though he could not have really consumed them, he might have reduced them, in moral effect, to ashes; or have over-blazed them with the more effulgent flames of his purer genius.

But this was not to be. To GREECE, the inspirer of some of his most exquisite poetry, he gave his latest breath. Brief though his mortal career, his connection with HER alone has won for him the bright longevity of fame. His name is uttered by her regenerated sons with affection and respect: and, in the earliest pages of her *second* history, they will proudly record, as one of her warmest friends, the POET OF ENGLAND, who, having with Timothean energy sung the fame of their fathers, was ready to achieve with his sword what he had

exhorted with his pen, had not the hand of Death laid him prematurely in the Grave.

Peace to his manes! The head that thought and the hand that wrote lie now in the hall of silence: the pulse of joy and the throb of anguish are alike at rest. Let the willow of our Compassion hang over the grave of his Errors.







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